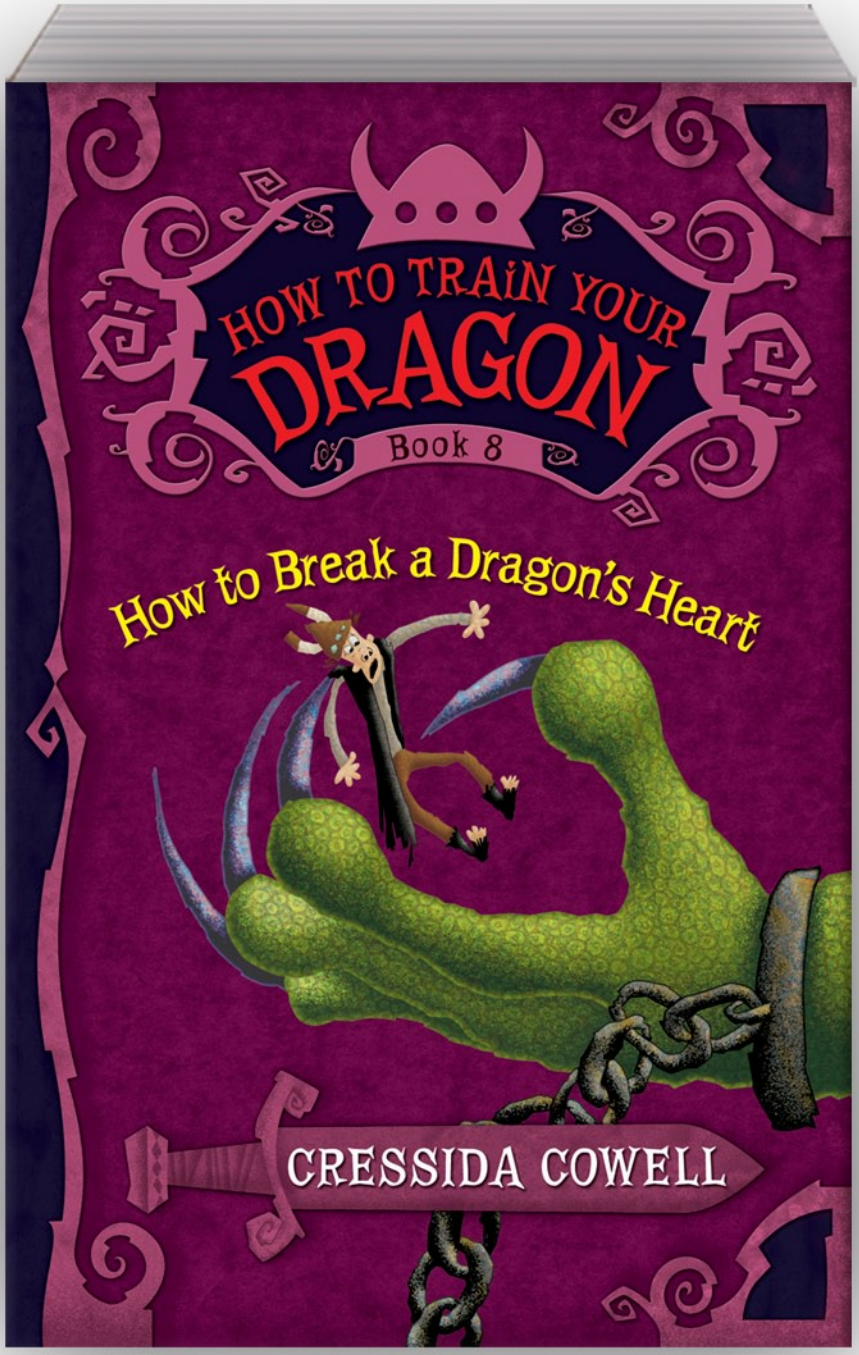


LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

HOW TO BREAK A DRAGON'S HEART

The Heroic Misadventures of
Hiccup the Viking

as told to
Cressida Cowell

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY
New York Boston

One summer, not too long ago, a boy digging on a beach found a box that contained the following papers.

They are the eighth volume of memoirs of Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, the famous Viking Hero, dragon whisperer, and top swordfighter.

They tell the story of how he faced the dreadful fate of being fed to the Beast in a wicker basket on the island of Berserk, and how he found out the secret of the Lost Throne of the Wilderwest, and what happened to his ancestor, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Second . . .

PROLOGUE BY HICCUP HORRENDOUS HADDOCK III, THE LAST OF THE GREAT VIKING HEROES

History is a ghost story.

My own childhood has passed into history, and the ghosts I find there are the ghosts of Heroes and dragons and Berserks and witches, and it has become fashionable not to believe in these things anymore.

But I believe, for I was there.

And just because YOU, dear Reader, have never seen a dragon or a witch—or a ghost—does not necessarily mean that they do not exist.

This Quest is the story of the most important moment in my entire life so far.

It was the first time I learned that the names on the flat map of the Archipelago, such as the Bay of the Broken Heart, were not just made-up fantastical names, but names that related to real people who had real, flesh-and-blood lives, and the things that happened to them still haunted the place where I was growing up.

That is what *I* mean by ghosts.

The Lost Throne of the Wilderwest

Peering above the great gray remorseless ocean, poking defiantly out of the endless, ever-changing sea, is the broken back of an island like a humpback whale. And somewhere in the wind-tossed, storm-blown grasses, where the wind howls across the blasted heather and the trees are all blown into hoops, are the two stout stone stumps on which once stood the Everlasting Throne of the Kings of the Wilderwest.

HERE sat Grimbeard the Ghastly, the Last Great King, looking out over the rooftops of his bustling Viking city, stroking his great sword, the Stormblade.

And HERE, where the seagulls circle and the wolves gather pace for the hunt across the marshes, was once a harbor for a hundred ships that Grimbeard sent to the north, south, east, and west, seizing plunder, treasure, and slaves, in jolly Viking fashion.

HERE he once stood, clenched his fist, and shouted, "I NAME THIS LAND TOMORROW, FOR IT SHALL LAST FOREVERMORE!"

And a thousand men lifted up their spears and shouted their approval, while the dragons winked their ancient eyes as if to say, "*We have heard all this before*…"

HERE he was betrayed by his own flesh and blood in the middle of a game of chess…

HERE is where he spilled that blood, the blood of his own son, on the kingly marble…

HERE the flames licked the sky as the city went up like a million candles…

HERE the bright clean sound of sword on sword…

HERE the harbor crammed berry-red with corpses…

And HERE the defeated Warrior-King looked back to see several lifetimes' worth of dreams go up in smoke as his boat began to limp like a wounded wolf across the sea to the island of Despair.

And that was the end of the Last King of the Wilderwest. The throne was lost, the chess pieces scattered across the ocean, the Stormblade buried, the Kingdom shattered into a hundred warring Tribes again. And Grimbeard sailed into the west, never to be seen again.

But HERE was where it once all happened.

HERE, where the eagles soar over knotted rags of brambles.

And the sea-filled caves in the bleak black cliffs echo to the ache of no human voice.

MIDSUMMER STORM

There are many storms in the Barbaric Archipelago.

But *this* was the greatest storm in more than one hundred years.

It came, without warning, at the height of midsummer.

For three days it raged without stopping, howling like a god in pain, blowing over houses, tearing up trees, picking up ships and tossing them down into the depths of the ocean as if they were matches, caring nothing for the tiny human habitations clinging like ants to the barren island wildernesses, mowing them down as if they were nothing.

A storm like this causes many things to be lost, and many things to be found.

Many a boat can be dragged down in the tempest. And many a strange object that everyone had forgotten about can be dragged up from the depths of the ocean and tossed up along with a whole heap of driftwood on one of the beaches.

This particular storm caused someone to be lost.

Camicazi, the tiny, intrepid, tangle-haired daughter of Big-Boobied Bertha, the Chief of the

Bog-Burglars, was out on the sea, alone in her boat, *The Stormy Petrel*,* when the storm struck.

Even before the tempest was past, the Bog-Burglars were out looking for her. And when the winds finally dropped and the Tribes of the Archipelago were waking up to the devastation of flattened cowsheds and walls and houses and upside-down trees, and were wearily getting down to the task of rebuilding their lives again, the Bog-Burglars were already scouring the very edges of the Archipelago in their black-sailed boats, shouting, "Caaaaaaa-mi-caaaaaaaaaaaa-ziiiiiiiiiiiii! Caaaaaaa-mi-caaaaaaaaaaaa-ziiiiiiiiiiiii! Caaaaaaa-mi-caaaaaaaaaaaa-ziiiiiiiiiiiii!"

But answer came there none.

*The stormy petrel is the smallest of the seabirds. They were so named because sailors thought they warned of incoming storms.

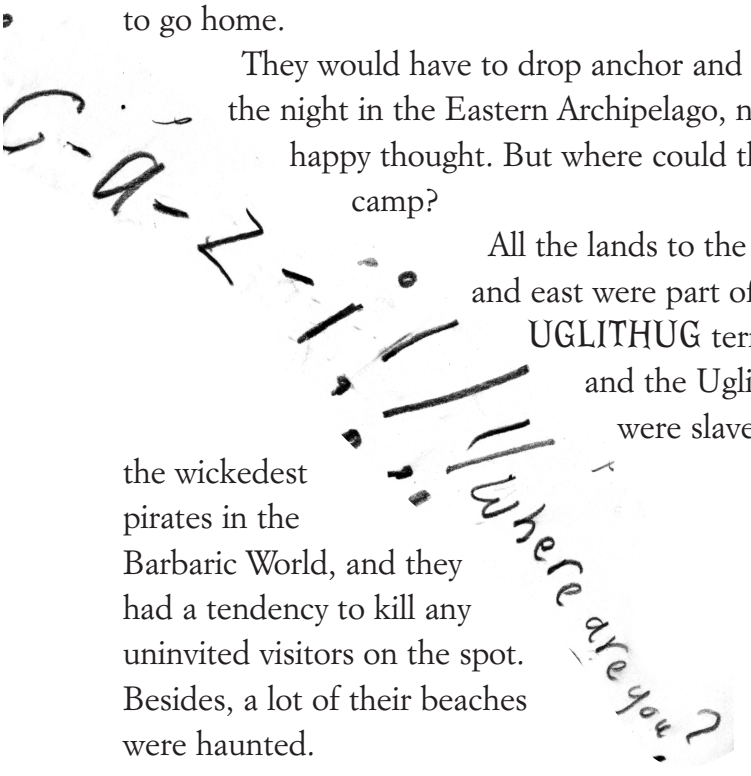
1. THE LOST CHILD

And so it was that one summer evening, two Hooligan ships were going round and round in circles around the little island of the Quiet Life in the Eastern Archipelago.

It was odd for Hooligan ships to be in the Eastern Archipelago, for that part of the world is exceptionally dangerous, and the Vikings tended to avoid it at all costs.

There are many, many horrors in the Eastern Archipelago. The only reason the Hooligans were there at all was because they were helping Big-Boobied Bertha search for her missing daughter. And now evening was drawing in, and in their quest to find the lost child, they had traveled far, far, far from their safe, cozy little home on the Isle of Berk, and it was too late to go home.

They would have to drop anchor and spend the night in the Eastern Archipelago, never a happy thought. But where could they camp?



All the lands to the north and east were part of UGLITHUG territory, and the Uglithugs were slavers and the wickedest pirates in the Barbaric World, and they had a tendency to kill any uninvited visitors on the spot. Besides, a lot of their beaches were haunted.

Of course, there was the island of Berserk.

But then again, the Berserks went crazy on a full moon and howled like dogs and fed people in baskets to some nameless thing that lived in the wildness of the woods…

So that left the island of the Quiet Life as the *only* safe place in the Eastern Archipelago to spend the night.

Which was why the Hooligans had spent the last hour and a half going round and round it in circles, searching for the perfect camping spot.

"HALT!" shouted Stoick the Vast, O Hear His Name and Tremble, Ugh, Ugh, the Chief of the Hairy Hooligan Tribe. He was an impressive figure with a magnificent red beard like a lion's mane that had been vigorously back-combed by maniacs.

"REST YOUR OARS A MOMENT!"

Stoick turned to his son, Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, who was standing beside him on the deck of *The Fat Penguin*, peering anxiously over the figurehead, shielding his eyes from the setting sun as he scanned the horizon.

Hiccup was a most unlikely Heir to the Hooligan Tribe. An ordinary-looking boy, with red hair and long, skinny limbs and the kind of anxious freckled

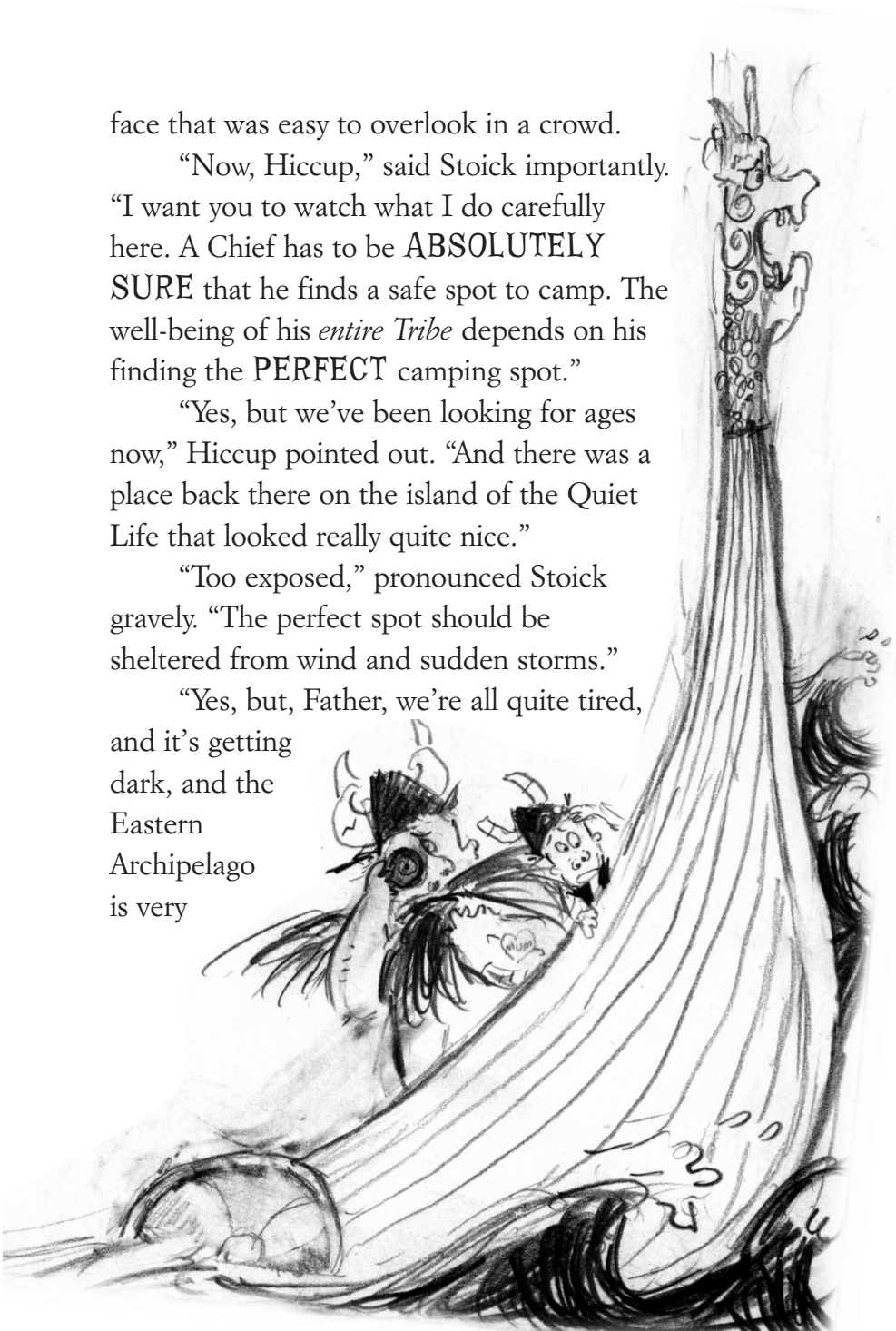
face that was easy to overlook in a crowd.

"Now, Hiccup," said Stoick importantly. "I want you to watch what I do carefully here. A Chief has to be ABSOLUTELY SURE that he finds a safe spot to camp. The well-being of his *entire Tribe* depends on his finding the PERFECT camping spot."

"Yes, but we've been looking for ages now," Hiccup pointed out. "And there was a place back there on the island of the Quiet Life that looked really quite nice."

"Too exposed," pronounced Stoick gravely. "The perfect spot should be sheltered from wind and sudden storms."

"Yes, but, Father, we're all quite tired, and it's getting dark, and the Eastern Archipelago is very



dangerous," Hiccup said. "What about all those other places we looked at?"

"Too muddy, too many jellyfish, not enough

places to pitch the tents, no lookout area…" said Stoick. "You need to look for the PERFECT spot, Hiccup." He patted Hiccup condescendingly on the back. "That's why *I'm* the Captain, son. Watch and learn, my boy, watch and learn."

Stoick stalked off enthusiastically to look for other suitable spots, while his crew rested their weary arms and grumbled mutinously. Somebody said that perhaps if Stoick was so keen to find the perfect camping spot, he might like to take over at the oars.

But they said it very quietly, so that Stoick wouldn't hear.

"I hate camping," said Fishlegs, Hiccup's best friend. "It does terrible things to my asthma." Fishlegs was a tall, spindly runner-bean of a boy who had eczema as well as asthma and was allergic to wheat and dairy. Not to mention dragons.

"This is all *your* fault, Useless…"* snarled Snotface Snotlout, Hiccup's cousin. Snotlout was a large, arrogant adolescent with a natural air of leadership and a lot of skeleton tattoos. He spat thoughtfully into the sea.

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*Hiccup the Useless was Snotlout's nickname for Hiccup.

"We wouldn't be out here looking for a lousy little Bog-Burglar if *you* hadn't turned your father soft, so that he made allies with those mud-trotting female no-hopers," sneered Snotlout. "Before you started interfering, there was an excellent saying, 'The only good Bog-Burglar is a dead Bog-Burglar.' And what I say is, if we find her dear ickle Bog-Burglar corpse floating down that gorge over there tomorrow morning, I, for one, will not be blubbing into my cocoa."

"Har, har, har," snorted Dogsbreath the Duhbrain, Snotlout's friend and fellow bully.

"You're such a charmer, Snotlout," snapped Hiccup. "No wonder you make friends easily."

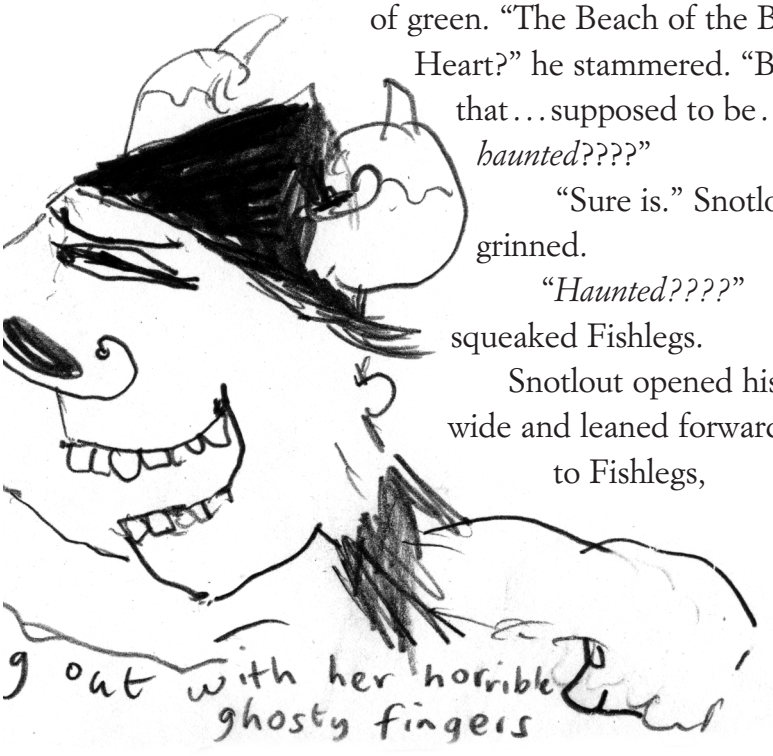
"But seriously," drawled Snotlout, "look around you, Useless. You and your father have really put us in danger here. We've drifted into UGLITHUG territory. See that island over there?" Snotlout pointed to an ominous, brooding dark shape to the south from which a strange, humming, drumming noise seemed to be coming. "You want to know what *that* is, sweet pea? That's BERSERK, that is. And *this* beach that we're drifting into now? This is the Beach of the Broken Heart…"

Dogsbreath the Duhbrain stopped giggling abruptly and turned an unattractive shade of green. "The Beach of the Broken Heart?" he stammered. "But isn't that…supposed to be… *haunted*????"

"Sure is." Snotlout grinned.

"*Haunted????*" squeaked Fishlegs.

Snotlout opened his eyes wide and leaned forward to Fishlegs,



whispering conspiratorially. "That's right, you weed. The Beach of the Broken Heart is haunted, so they say, by a ghost lady in a ghost ship . . . searching forever for her lost, dead child . . . and if she finds YOU instead . . . why" — and he paused for effect — "she reaches into your chest with her horrible ghosty fingers" — Fishlegs and Dogsbreath both covered their chests hurriedly — "and she takes out your beating heart and sails with it back to the ghost world," finished Snotlout with relish.

Dogsbreath was so anxious that he dropped his drawn dagger rather painfully onto his toe. "OOOOW . . ."

"That is such RUBBISH, Snotlout," said Hiccup loudly. "That's just a myth, created because the marshes behind the beach are home to a rare kind of bird called the Neverbird, and it makes a sound like a crying ghost."

Snotlout leaned back and crossed his tattooed arms casually. "*Is* it rubbish though?" he said. "We could be in serious danger here. And all for a dirty little Bog-Burglar who has nothing to do with the Hooligan Tribe. I repeat. All *your* fault, Useless."

And it was just at that moment that Hiccup's hunting dragon, Toothless, returned to *The Fat Penguin*

from a scouting mission, making a clumsy crash landing on Hiccup's head.

Hiccup had sent Toothless ahead to investigate coves and rocks and beaches and likely places where a small boat might have been blown and wrecked by a mighty storm.

If Hiccup was an unlikely Heir to the Hooligan Tribe, Toothless was an even more unlikely hunting-dragon-to-the-Heir. He was a Common or Garden dragon, the least rare of the dragon species (although he claimed to be something much more exotic), and he was at least half the size of the other young Warriors' hunting dragons. He had no obvious weapons and, as his name suggests, no teeth.

At the moment he was genuinely anxious, but the drama of the search, and the lateness of the hour, and the importance of *him*, Toothless, leading the hunt from the front, not to mention the fact that he had missed two meals and two naps, had led him to cross the line into hopeless, fidgety, overexcitement.

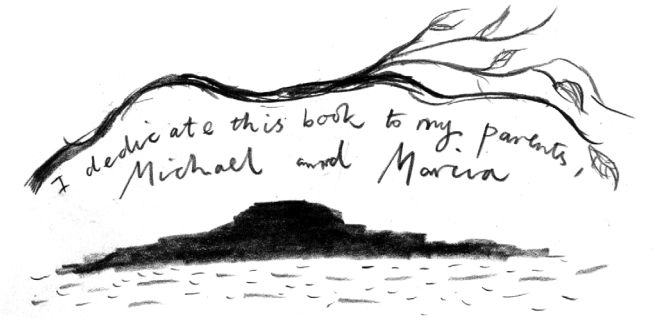
He was wound up tighter than a tick that had feasted on several large, sugar-laced cups of coffee.

Toothless always had a stammer, but now he was so beside himself he couldn't even get the words out. He just jumped up and down on Hiccup's head, pointing his wings at the Beach of the Broken Heart.

"What is it, Toothless? What is it?" asked Hiccup.* Stoick, who was squinting all around him and discussing with his second-in-command the relative merits of different camping areas, spotted Toothless pointing and turned his telescope toward the Beach of the Broken Heart.

"Well *that's* not a suitable camping spot." Stoick grunted but then he stopped. "Hang on a second. What's that? *THERE'S SOMETHING ON THE BEACH OVER THERE!"*

*Hiccup was one of the few Vikings who were able to speak Dragonese, the language the dragons spoke to each other.



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First U.S. Trade Paperback Edition: June 2012
First U.S. Hardcover Edition: November 2011
Originally published in Great Britain in 2009 by Hodder Children's Books

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cowell, Cressida.
How to break a dragon's heart / by Cressida Cowell. — 1st U.S. ed.
p. cm. — (How to train your dragon ; bk. 8)
ISBN 978-0-316-17618-7 (hc) / 978-0-316-17617-0 (pb)
I. How to train your dragon (Motion picture) II. Title.
PZ7.C83535Hlh 2011
[E] — dc22

2011009836

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Printed in the United States of America

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Old Wrinkly